

## ***Laudato sì: The Human Implications for Business and Political Leaders***

*Laudato sì* is not just about nature and the environment. It is about us: every one of us - the people who populate the earth, and who have the responsibility to take good care of it. It is a manifestation of love. Love for one another and love for the creation that surrounds us and makes our life sustainable. “Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also ‘macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones’. That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a ‘civilization of love’.”

The Holy Father is inviting us to reflect on our past, on our present and on our future, as human beings, blessed with all the resources that we need to survive. However, it is not just an invitation to reflect and stop there. It’s an invitation to take immediate action if we honestly want to leave behind us a better world for future generations.

These are his words: “Politics and business have been slow to react in a way commensurate with the urgency of the challenges facing our world. Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities.”

Pope Francis does not only portray a realistic picture of what humanity has evolved into so far but he also gives us his wise advice on the urgent actions that need to be taken to ensure that we, humans, reverse the damage that we have caused because of our greed for power and money. He refers to business, economics, finance, technology and politics without ever mentioning the phrase ‘business and/or political leaders’. I did not need to dig very deeply to read the message: We humans are responsible for the management of the earth’s rich resources. We have done a bad job so far and we need to do something urgently to turn around and rethink our situation to create a viable way forward.

In his own words: “Many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change. However, many of these symptoms indicate that such effects will continue to worsen if we continue with current models of production and consumption.”

The current models of production and consumption are dictated by those who wield economic and political power and therefore by business and political leaders. His Holiness calls for a change of ‘mind-set’. A mind-set that moves away from the present “technocratic paradigm that also tends to dominate economic and political life” in the pursuit of profit maximisation and without any “concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings.”

This takes me to discuss the dominant leadership styles that business and political leaders have adopted throughout the years with a view to identify which style would perhaps come closest to bring about the radical changes that Pope Francis is proposing. A leadership style

that challenges the present situation where: “social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs.”

Social Psychology enlightens us in this respect by identifying three fundamental norms that bind organisations, communities and societies together: Truth, Trust and Respect. Three very small words - but pregnant with significant meaning. Truth: when my boss says something I believe that what is being said is true. Trust: because I know that it is true I am aware that she or he trusts me and I trust him or her. Respect: My boss gives me the time and the space to say my own. Take one of these three fundamental norms out of the leadership equation and the community will fall apart.

So, what makes a good leader? Researchers have identified no less than nine different leadership styles. These range from: the Machiavellian tyrannical leader, that assumes that humanity is evil, selfish and untrustworthy; to the Weberian benevolent autocrat, that assumes that humanity is irrational and subject to emotion; to Taylorism and Scientific Management, that assumes that human nature is lazy and wasteful; and to the non-autocratic ‘leader as servant’ that assumes that humanity is ‘other-centred’, co-operative and collaborative, humanity at its best. Which one of these leadership styles would fit the business and political mind-set being proposed by Pope Francis? A few years ago I would have opted for the last style: leader as servant, not only because it was the latest development but also because it is the oldest leadership style that pre-dates Machiavelli by more than 1,500 years and was practised by one of the most prominent and influential leaders humanity has ever seen: Our Lord Jesus Christ – “I come not to be served but to serve”!

A contingency approach to leadership would suggest that a leader is free to adopt that style that best fits the current realities of the situation being managed. However, very recently a more important development in the camp of leadership is being proposed: Authentic Leadership. This style embraces the three fundamental social norms – truth, trust and respect. It is about being honest and true first to yourself and then to your followers. Being honest you will gain the trust and respect of your followers and thus fits Pope Francis’ belief that “Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and ‘take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system’.”

Authentic leaders in business and politics will bring about the “Social love [that] is the key to authentic development: In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity.”

I, therefore, encourage all leaders in business and in politics to seriously consider taking on an authentic leadership style to accomplish and translate into reality Pope Francis’ message: “Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom.”

To conclude may I borrow some lines from *Laudato si* and pray:

“Lord,  
Enlighten those who possess power and money  
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,  
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,  
and care for this world in which we live.”

Thank you.

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